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Dealing With Iran: How Experts See It

President Reagan's decision to authorize unpublicized talks with Iranian officials and send them some weapons and spare parts has touched off a major dispute involving United States foreign policy and has prompted a heated debate that has transcended the usual partisan divisions in Washington. Mr. Reagan has angrily denied reports that he traded arms for American hostages held in Lebanon by pro-Iranian militants. Many of his critics challenge this assertion. Some experts who have followed the United States-Iran relationship, ranging from former Directors of Central Intelligence to scholars, were asked these questions: Is it good or bad to trade military supplies for hostages? What are the pros and cons of making such overtures to the Iranians? And what are the prospects for the United States to restore and improve its ruptured relations with Iran? Here are excerpts from their replies:



The New York Times/Stan Barouh

Shaul Bakhash

Professor of Government
George Mason University

For the U.S. Government that has made the foundation of its policy not to bargain with hostage-takers, trading arms for hostages is not a very wise policy. It encourages further hostage-taking; it sends the wrong signals to America's allies, and it suggests that the U.S. Government has not been straightforward with its own people.

The policy of slow pressure, denial of arms and technology, attempting to give the specific country a bad name abroad has worked. The evidence is the small signs of moderation in Iran's foreign policy, including recent attempts to secure for itself a better reputation abroad.

The U.S. has always posed a special problem for Iran because of the history of relations and because the current domestic strains working against the normalization of relations are very considerable.



William Quandt

Acting Director
Foreign Policy Program
Brookings Institution

I would make a distinction between a one-time exception where you might get all the hostages for one dirty deal of spare parts to Iran and say that's it. What is particularly dangerous is to get into a more open-ended thing where, one by one, we get hostages out. It provides a perverse incentive to Iran to keep some hostages.

The dangers are that, in setting up this pattern, it sends some signals to countries with whom you have been pursuing a different policy. You appear two-faced.

The potential benefits are, I suppose, if you get the hostages out, it is worth something. It's harder for me to buy on to the argument that you gain serious entree to political circles in Iran that will benefit you in the future. In today's Iran, any Iranian will take arms where he can get them. I doubt he will feel any warm sentiments of gratitude.



Associated Press

Richard Helms

Former C.I.A. Director
Ex-Ambassador to Iran

It depends a bit on the extent to which we have been sending spare parts. If it is, as I expect, a few spare parts, I would think this was not an unfair exchange.

The danger in such a practice is that if one is prepared to pay for hostages, there may be no end to the number of hostages taken.

On the other hand, it is reasonable to say that if this policy of trying to get back the hostages does not work, one can always jettison it.

The benefits are simple. It gets back American citizens who have been taken by individuals or groups who have their own agenda.

In this case, we're dealing with a Lebanese splinter group which wants to get back from Kuwait some of its members arrested in that country, but it is a splinter group not directed by any foreign state, be it Iran, Syria, or Lebanon.



The New York Times/ Doug Steele

R. K. Ramazani

Professor of Government
University of Virginia

The greatest concern I have is that this is going to prejudice our chances of an improving relationship in Iran in nonstrategic areas, because it has put egg on the face of the moderates, and now the moderates will go out of their way to distance themselves from us.

The possible benefits one could think about are establishing some modicum of contact with the so-called pragmatists, and therefore prepositioning ourselves for the postwar and post-Khomeini period.

If indeed it is not in the United States interest for either of two belligerents in the Iran-Iraq war to win, then to the extent this maintains the balance of power, it is consistent with American policies to give arms.

From Iran, we have perhaps seen exaggerated statements that this kind of deal might reduce our credibility with friends in the gulf region. These countries have their own reasons to maintain the dialogue with Iran.



United Press International

Stansfield Turner
Former C.I.A. Director

It undermines our ability to lead the rest of the world in an anti-terrorist crusade, which we badly need to do. We had been telling other people not to deal with Iran. What the rest of the world has to perceive this as is a self-ish, contradictory, hypocritical move on our part to do what we told others not to do.

I am persuaded that this was primarily a swap of arms for hostages. It is asking people to be gullible to believe otherwise.

Nobody in the Khomeini Government is going to cozy up to the United States. I think it is a very slim chance as long as Khomeini is in power, or even when Khomeini is gone. We would be well advised to stay in the background and let other free-world nations, such as Britain, Japan and France, be the point people for bringing Iran back into the community of nations.



Jupp Darchinger

Zbigniew Brzezinski

National Security Adviser
To President Carter

If we had been able to obtain the release of all of the hostages for a single, self-contained shipment of arms, the arrangement would have been distasteful but palatable. Unfortunately we were drawn into a situation in which armed shipments were apparently traded for hostages almost on a one-by-one basis.

That creates two negative consequences: The Iranians can string us along and even take more hostages in order to keep the arms flow going. It creates the impression that the United States is siding with Iran against Iraq in the war.

The effort to establish some links with some potential successors to Khomeini is justified by the geostrategic importance of Iran. I do not believe, however, that this need entail a continuing arms-supplying relationship. There are other ways in which such subtle relationships could have been cultivated.



United Press International

William Colby

Former C.I.A. Director

I have no objection to secret diplomacy and communication with anyone. It is particularly important to communicate with those who are opposed to us. On the other hand, this does not include providing weaponry.

The danger is a strengthening of Iran in the gulf region. This could lead to pressure on Saudi Arabia and the gulf states in the short term. It could result in a surge of Islamic fundamentalism in countries such as Egypt, Pakistan, obviously Libya, Jordan, and nations all the way from Morocco to Indonesia.

With the present Government, I have strong doubts. They have indicated total hostility. Their cause is fundamentally an ideological cause against the "great Satan" — the United States — and against modern culture and society.

FILE ONLY

J FORMER CIA DIRECTOR CALLS REAGAN'S HOSTAGE POLICY 'HYPOCRITICAL'
BY JEFFREY K. PARKER
NEW YORK

A Former CIA Director Stansfield Turner said the Reagan administration's reported delivery of arms to Iran hurt the United States' credibility with its allies and is hypocritical.

Turner, who headed the intelligence agency under President Jimmy Carter, said the unconfirmed secret deals reportedly made to help win freedom for U.S. hostages has "seriously hurt our ability to lead a free-world coalition against terrorism."

Turner spoke to United Press International prior to taking part in a panel discussion in Manhattan on "disinformation," or the release of false information, by government agencies.

Turner, who headed the CIA from 1977 to 1981, said the arms activities had damaged the administration's credibility with its allies in the West.

"We had just importuned our friends not to sell arms" before the reports began to surface. As a result, providing arms to Iran "makes the administration appear to be hypocritical," he said.

The Reagan administration has not confirmed or denied reports that the United States may have supplied Iran with U.S.-made arms in exchange for Tehran's cooperation in freeing hostages held by pro-Iran extremists. The White House has said it has taken no illegal action.

Turner denounced the administration for failing to fully advise Congress of its actions.

"The president has got to make a real bow to the Congress this time," Turner said. "This administration has flouted the Congress and congressional oversight for six years."

If the government does conduct secret deals exchanging weapons for hostages, Congress will likely enact laws prohibiting the practice, he said.

By closely concealing and guarding its activities, "The White House is trying to avoid accountability" should its efforts to gain release of hostages fail, Turner said.

Turner said the administration was wrong to aggressively pursue improved diplomatic links with Iran, regardless of their value in getting hostages out of Lebanon, because the Iranian government remains hostile to American interests.

During the panel discussion, sponsored by the Center for Communication, an educational group that brings together communications professionals and public policy makers, Turner said the administration was duplicitous in its approach to rescuing the hostages.

Days after hostage David Jacobsen was freed Nov. 2, he was flown to Washington for a public White House ceremony where Reagan "ballyhooed the event," Turner said. "Then he (Reagan) importuned the press not to talk about it."

IRAN/COLBY
TYLER, TX

A Former CIA director William Colby on Monday blasted the Reagan administration for going against the country's strategic position in the Middle East to free a hostage.

Colby, in Tyler to speak to a local college group, said the administration erred if, as reported, it gave weapons to Iran in return for Iran's assistance in negotiating the freedom of American David Jacobsen and other Americans held hostage in Lebanon.

"We gave arms to a country that is a sworn eternal enemy to us and is also engaged in a war against somebody (Iraq) who is stopping their further expansion," Colby said.

Colby said the alleged deal makes no sense because Iran can now use those weapons against people fighting in America's basic interest.

Colby, who ran the Central Intelligence Agency in the mid-1970s when it was a favorite target for congressional criticism, said Congress likely will launch another broadside against the administration for the alleged arms deal with Iran.

"One of the lessons about American life is that nothing stays secret very long," Colby said. "Then the basic question is, 'Why did you do it and how do you resolve its basic contradiction with stated American policy?'"

The Iranian Connection

A William E. Colby

Support Iraq—Not Iran

A myopic focus on hostage relief, with its potential for politically beneficial television emotion (a contrast to the Carter administration's agony), has led the Reagan administration into the McFarlane adventure directly conflicting with longer-term U.S. interests in the Persian Gulf (which certainly at this time would be better "Arabian" than "Persian"). Communication with the leaders of Iran, open or secret, is fully justifiable, but the provision of spare parts for Iranian arms (even by proxy) is not. It directly contradicts announced American policy. Naive hopes of bringing the more "moderate" among the leadership of Iran to the succession to ailing Ayatollah Khomeini ignore the geopolitical and ideological realities of the entire gulf region.

The key fact in the gulf is the Iran-Iraq war, which is now in its seventh year of agony. It has produced a million casualties on both sides, as Iran has used human-wave attacks of dedicated young people, and Iraq has relied upon heavy firepower to meet their superior numbers. Iran is again preparing for a "final offensive" and has improved the professionalism of the Revolutionary Guards. Iraq has met these assaults with financial and some volunteer support from fellow Arab nations hoping to keep the Persian ayatollah and Shiite fundamentalism away from Kuwait, Saudi Arabia and the other Arab states. It has asserted its desire for a settlement of the war at the original borders, but Khomeini has refused any outcome but the overthrow of the Saddam Hussein government of Iraq and the payment of full reparations, blaming it for starting the war.

Prudence requires a consideration of the result if an Iranian offensive were to succeed. An Iraqi collapse could be followed by an assault upon the borders of Saudi Arabia, overrunning Kuwait and a major threat to the other sources of oil in the gulf. The gulf states and Saudi Arabia would undoubtedly try to conciliate a successful Iran, rather than fight it, and some steps in that direction may already be taking place, which the revelation of the McFarlane mission can only accelerate. World oil prices set by Iranian leadership would hardly be restrained. The momentum of an Iranian success could inflame fundamentalism as far afield as Lebanon, Egypt, Morocco and Indonesia. Syria, which has been accommodative to Iranian intervention in Lebanon because of its hostility to Iraq, could be led to bolder action against Israel and in its support of terrorism generally.

A world oil supply hostage to the ayatollah's hatreds would immediately raise the question whether American and European naval and air power would be needed to protect Saudi Arabia, the gulf states and oil shipments in the gulf. Such a direct involvement of American forces with Iran would have enormous implications. A retreat by the United States from such an engagement would be equally serious. The Soviet Union could be no less affected, torn between the advantage of a breakdown of the Western position in the gulf and the hostility with which the ayatollah crushed the Tudeh Communist Party and provides assistance to the *mujaheddin* in Afghanistan.

Thus, it is in the interest of the United States, the Western world and even the Soviet Union that Iraq successfully withstand the Iranian assault. Rather than winking at arms supplies for Iran, the United States would better make direct efforts to strengthen Iraq against Iran, to include arms supplies to the degree needed. The risks involved in support for Iraq against Iran are considerably less than the risks that would follow a defeat of Iraq by Iran.

The argument that the McFarlane operation is aimed at strengthening the more moderate ele-

ments of Iranian leadership does not survive close examination. Perhaps the Ayatollah Montazeri can be removed from the succession to an ailing Khomeini, but his replacement by Speaker Ali Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani offers no real hope that Iran will return to modernism and civilized international relations; even his announced conditions for the release of hostages are as extreme as those of the hostage holders in Lebanon.

Instead, the United States should indicate receptivity to a real change in leadership in Iran, one that will reassume Iran's positive and modernist role in Southwest Asia. The Reza Shah in 1921 took power in Iran against obscurantism. Whatever the failings of his successor in later years, it is clear that he initiated economic, political and social growth in Iran. The United States should actively encourage the appearance of a new Reza Shah, probably and preferably out of the army rather than the clergy, to open a better future for the people and nation of Iran, as well as a safer one for its neighbors and the other societies vulnerable to Khomeini's effort to spread chaos throughout the region.

The writer was CIA director under presidents Nixon and Ford.

